Speech for the
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada,
Vic Toews, Q.C.
London Rotary Club
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Introduction

Thank you, [MC], for your kind introduction.

And thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here today. London is a beautiful city and it is always a joy to visit this area. As members of the London Rotary Club, I commend your efforts to help make this a stronger, healthier city. Your organization is a vital part of the community and the work you do helps to make London a better place to live.

I'm sure that all of us here would agree that safe streets and low crime rates are good for London. When a city such as London is known as a safe, friendly, and vibrant community, people want to move here. They want to raise their families here.

This government understands this sentiment: in the first five months we have taken leadership to strengthen communities and assist millions of ordinary, hard-working Canadians.

- We're helping Canadians get ahead by cutting taxes, including a cut to the GST.
- We've introduced a real child care plan: before the end of July parents will receive their first child care cheque worth $1,200 a year for children under six.
- We are moving towards a Patient Wait Times Guarantee.
- To restore your faith in an accountable Ottawa, we've introduced the most sweeping accountability measures in our country's history.
- And we are working on protecting families and Canada's way of life by cracking down on guns, gangs and drugs.

As Canada's Minister of Justice, my job is to make Canada's communities safer by tackling crime. Our new government has made this one of our top five priorities. And it is a goal that Canadians want to see achieved.

Canadians believe in a law-abiding, peaceful Canada. They believe in secure streets and neighbourhoods where children can play in safety. They believe in communities that are free of drugs, gangs, and guns. This is the Canada we know and love - the Canada we cherish.

But in recent years, when we read our morning papers or watch our evening news, we are seeing more and more stories about illegal drugs, gang violence, and other serious crimes. Sometimes it's hard to believe that these things are happening in Canada. But they are.

Is this Canada's future? Is this the direction our country is headed? The answer is no. Canadians

are fed up with the soft approach to crime that has been taken for so long. They want their Government to get tough on criminals. They want their Government to send a clear message that violence will not be tolerated in our communities. Most of all, Canadians want to enjoy the happy, prosperous, and peaceful existence that comes from living in a law-abiding society.

This is my second visit to London since taking on the role of Justice Minister. Our government has made significant progress since that first visit. I'm pleased to be able to discuss some of the progress with this community. This spring, our new Government introduced five new bills aimed at getting tough on serious crime. With these stronger laws, we will be more effective in the fight against drugs, gangs, and guns. We will clean up our streets. We will restore safety to our communities. And we will continue to build the kind of Canada we want and deserve.

Conditional Sentencing Reform

One of the first things we said we would do is reform our laws with regard to conditional sentencing. And we did just that.

Conditional sentences, which often involve house arrest, all too often are being handed to serious and violent offenders. I believe this sends the wrong message. I believe that violent offenders deserve more than a slap on the wrist. People who commit serious crimes deserve a harsher penalty than sitting back and enjoying the comforts of home.

We know that conditional sentences have led to several tragedies. In 2003, a Toronto man stabbed his girlfriend twelve times in a fit of drunken rage. The woman survived the attack, and he was handed a conditional sentence. Two weeks into serving that conditional sentence, he stabbed another woman and left her to die in the stairwell of an apartment building.

With our proposed reforms, people who commit serious and violent crime will not serve their time at home or in the community. Instead of house arrest, they'll do their time behind bars.

These reforms will help ensure a cautious and more appropriate use of conditional sentences, reserving them for less serious offences that pose a low risk to community safety.

Mandatory Minimum Penalties

At the same time that we introduced our Conditional Sentencing Reform Bill, we also introduced our Mandatory Minimum Penalties Bill for gun crimes.

Guns, gangs and drugs are a growing problem, especially in our cities. And the three are very closely linked. Police, who deal with these problems every day, tell us guns are the tools of the trade for drug dealers, and the drug dealers are members of gangs. The connection is obvious, but it bears repeating.

So, by taking gunmen off the streets, we take drug dealers off the streets. We take gang members off the streets. And we send them a clear message.

With mandatory minimum penalties, we are saying, as a nation, that we do not tolerate acts of violence. We are saying that people who use guns to commit crimes and terrorize communities will be locked up for a long time.

We all remember the terrible incident that occurred on Boxing Day, when a young woman was murdered in downtown Toronto, in broad daylight. The young man who has been arrested in connection with that murder was on probation at the time. He had been released from prison in October, where he had been serving time for robbery. As this tragedy illustrates all too well, violent criminals should not be loose in our society. We must learn from these terrible incidents,

make the changes that are necessary, and ensure that they never happen again.

Under our proposed reforms, serious or repeat firearm offenders who use a firearm when committing an offence will spend more time behind bars, so they won't be able to threaten communities. If an offence is gang-related, or if a restricted firearm such as a handgun is used, we will deal with the offender more harshly on the first offence and with every subsequent offence.

Other firearm-related offences will also be subject to higher minimum penalties. Those who are caught smuggling firearms or breaking and entering to steal a firearm will be handed stiffer jail terms.

With this legislation, our new Government is taking a tough stand against violent crime. And we are sending a clear message to gang members and other violent criminals: if you use guns to commit crimes, you will be brought to justice and you will go to jail. Period.

DNA Data Bank

Our Government has also looked for ways to help Canada's police forces fight crime. And we have done so by strengthening our National DNA Data Bank legislation.

Our National DNA Data Bank has already proven itself to be a powerful crime-solving tool.

The DNA Data Bank has led to prosecutions in murder cases that would have been difficult or impossible without this technology. It has also helped provide crucial leads in some unsolved cases. One such case was the 1984 murder of Mrs. Beverley Dyke, in Winnipeg. Thanks to DNA evidence, a first-degree murder charge has now been laid against a man who was in prison for a separate crime.

The reforms we introduced will give police better tools to investigate crime. They will further strengthen this crime-solving mechanism, helping our police to identify the guilty and exonerate the innocent.

The reforms include making it an offence to fail to appear for DNA sampling, and adding *attempted murder* and *conspiracy to commit murder* to the list of offences covered by the retroactive provisions of this legislation. In addition, the reforms will ensure that information provided by the Data Bank can be used to investigate all criminal offences.

I believe that supporting our country's police forces helps to reduce crime. With these important legislative amendments, our police officers will be better equipped to hunt down and apprehend dangerous offenders.

Street Racing

Our Government has also made a commitment to crack down on street racing.

Over the past few years, there have been a number of highly publicized incidents of street racing in Canadian cities where drivers, their passengers, and innocent victims have been killed. Since January alone, three men in Vancouver, one in Edmonton, and a Toronto taxi-cab driver have all allegedly been killed because of street racing.

It is clear that people who engage in street racing have little regard for their own safety, or the safety of others. The threat extends further than the racers themselves. Innocent bystanders have been seriously injured and killed by this dangerous activity. This spring, on the day I introduced our new street racing bill, students of our Lady of the Annunciation School in Richmond Hill, Ontario came to Ottawa to present a petition, calling on the Government to crack down on this

problem. The graduating Grade 8 class told me about a fellow student, a 7-year-old girl, made an orphan. Her parents, walking a city street after an anniversary dinner, were struck down by a driver suspected of street racing.

This tragic story makes it crystal clear - street racing is not about kids having fun. It's reckless. It's dangerous. And all too often it kills.

Our new Government is committed to keeping racers off our streets. We believe that a tougher approach is needed to combat this dangerous activity - one that makes it clear that this is criminal conduct with real consequences.

With our new legislation, people who treat our public streets as racetracks will be dealt with more seriously. They'll be prohibited from driving for longer periods, and will face more jail time if their irresponsible behaviour leads to injuries or deaths.

I believe this is important legislation. By getting tough on street racers, we have taken another crucial step toward improving the safety of our streets and communities.

Age of Protection

Of course, community safety also involves protecting our most vulnerable citizens. Our most recent piece of legislation, the Age of Protection Bill, aims to do that.

Many of you will remember this story: Three years ago, a 15-year-old girl struck up an online friendship with a much older man living in Toronto. They chatted for about two weeks, then he sent her an airline ticket. By the time her terrified parents located her, she was getting off the plane at Pearson Airport.

This girl could have been in grave danger if she had actually gone to the man's house. But most people are surprised to learn that the Internet predator was in no danger at all. He hadn't broken the law because the girl was 15 and could legally consent to sexual activity.

This June, we introduced legislative proposals that would raise the age at which youth can consent to sexual activity from 14 to 16 years. A five year close-in-age exception is included in the legislation to ensure that consensual teenage sexual activity is not criminalized.

With these reforms, children and young people will be better protected from adult sexual predators. No longer will it be legal for a 35 or 40 year old to have consensual sex with a 14- or 15-year-old.

With the rise of new technologies such as the Internet, it has become increasingly important to increase the safety and security of Canadian families. By raising the age of protection by two years, the Government is targeting those who sexually prey upon some of society's most vulnerable individuals.

This new law will bring Canada's age of consent into conformity with many other like-minded countries. As well, this reform represents the shared objective of all provinces and territories of Canada which are committed to protecting youth against sexual exploitation.

When I introduced this bill, I was proud to have the support of Ottawa Police Chief Vince Bevan, as well as Beyond Borders, a group committed to ending the exploitation of children the world over. And Paul Gillespie, formerly of the Toronto Police Child Exploitation Unit, lent his support too. He and his former colleagues have been on the front lines battling sexual predators who prey on children. They've brought them to justice. They know that this bill is a common-sense measure to protect kids. It's an honour to give them another tool in their fight.

Effective Gun Control

These five pieces of legislation represent our Government's commitment to make our communities safer by getting tough on crime.

In addition to these five Justice bills, I should also mention that our new Government has moved forward with the long-needed changes to eliminate the long-gun registry.

Our Government believes that enforcement should be focused on criminals who use guns, not law-abiding long gun owners like farmers and duck hunters.

The Minister of Public Safety, Stockwell Day, has tabled legislative amendments to end the requirement for long-gun owners to register their hunting rifles and shotguns. We intend to take the resources wasted on the long-gun registry and re-invest them in real measures to tackle crime, including front-line policing.

Requirements for effective gun control will remain in place. Canadians are still required to have a valid firearms license to purchase or possess firearms and to purchase ammunition. As well, restricted firearms, such as handguns, must still be registered. Gun owners must also undergo background checks and pass a safety training course.

Budget 2006

I am also pleased to note that the 2006 budget delivers the resources needed to keep our communities safe.

The Budget set aside $161 million over two years to begin recruiting up to 1000 more RCMP personnel and federal prosecutors. This funding will better enable Canada's national police force to strengthen its federal policing role. This includes getting drugs off our streets, securing our borders, and cracking down on fraud and organized crime.

We delivered $37 million for the RCMP to expand its National Training Academy (Depot). This will accommodate the new officers and build the capacity to train more officers in the future.

The Budget provides $15 million to further strengthen the National DNA Data Bank.

- We set aside $20 million for communities to prevent youth crime with a focus on guns, gangs, and drugs. In fact, last week I announced over $2 million in funding to support 26 crime prevention initiatives in Manitoba.
- The Budget included $26 million to give victims a more effective voice in the federal corrections and justice system, and to give victims greater access to services (such as travel to appear at parole hearings).
- And we reserved $101 million to begin arming border officers and eliminating "work-alone" posts.

Conclusion

All of these initiatives - our five new laws, our plan for effective gun control, and our investments in safety and security - represent a balanced yet tough approach to combating crime. Criminals will no longer be coddled. Their rights will not trump those of their victims, or take precedence over community safety.

With these strong reforms we, as a nation, are fighting back against crime. We are taking back our streets and standing up for our communities. We are acknowledging that Canada has always been

known as a peaceful country, and we are aiming to build on that reputation.

We are working towards a Canada where every child can play safely in a park; where gangs with guns don't control whole areas of our cities; where teenagers don't get shot while Christmas shopping or at funerals. We want to end the cycle of abuse and addiction that harms families and communities, and give every Canadian at chance to succeed. It won't happen overnight, and it will require resolve from all levels of government and every citizen.

Our new government is committed to doing our part. In the election campaign we said we'd tackle crime. This spring, we followed through. As Minister of Justice, I will continue to work hard on behalf of all Canadians to help make this great country a safer, more secure place to live.

Thank you.

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